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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated 41 Ohio public school teachers' knowledge of inclusion through an achievement test format. The teachers were asked to identify statements related to inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classes as fact or myth. The mean score was 54.9 percent, leading to the conclusion that most educators are not adequately informed about inclusion. Responses to specific statements indicated that 63 percent of educators recognized that a statement that "the special educator would become an aid to the regular teacher" was a myth; 56 percent knew that the state does not mandate total inclusion; 71 percent realized that the success of the inclusion model is based on the strength of the school's attitude, flexibility, and collaboration efforts; and the need to vary the definition of the least restrictive environment for each child did not appear to be understood. The survey instrument is appended. (Contains 22 references.) (JDD)

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Understanding Inclusion

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Educational Professionals'
Understanding of the Inclusion Model
of Special Education
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Running head: UNDERSTANDING OF THE INCLUSION MODEL

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Are educators accurately informed about the inclusion model of special education? The focus of this research was to evaluate educators' knowledge of inclusion through an achievement test format. The educators were asked to identify given statements related to inclusion as fact or myth. Forty-one tests were returned out of seventy-five sent. Since the mean score for the test was 54.9%, the conclusion was that most educators are not adequately informed about inclusion.

Documented attempts of special education can be traced to 1799 by Jean-Marc Itard. The purpose of this research is not to address the historical development of special education. Rather, the purpose is to address the present services provided under the term, "Special Education." In 1975, Public Law 94-142 was passed, thus providing education to all children in the United States. From the original conception of special education by P.L. 94-142 the interpretation of the law has provided a continuum of services. The focus of this research is to address the addition of the inclusion model to the continuum of service. How accurately this addition to the continuum was understood by educators is the focus of this research. Since the intent of inclusion is to place or keep children in the regular classroom setting, the importance of having an accurate understanding of the concept of inclusion is believed to have an effect on the success of this option.

A full understand of the inclusion movement requires a basic understanding of Public Law 94-142 passed in 1975. Provisions for all children to receive

a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment is the ruling of PL 94-142. Briefly, the law guaranteed all children with disabilities would be provided with :

1. a free, appropriate public education
2. due process rights
3. education in the least restrictive environment
4. individualized education programming
5. parental involvement in the programming decisions to meet the individual needs

The least restrictive environment has often been defined as a place removed from the traditional classroom setting where special education services were provided. In 1986, Madeline Will of the U.S. Office of Special education proposed the regular education initiative(REI). (Lerner, J.) REI was the transition to the inclusion models presently available in Ohio.

The focus of the research presented here is the least restrictive environment offered by the inclusion model. Hence, other federal laws and placement practices between 1975 and 1993 will not be directly addressed.

The state of Ohio responded to the call for a more flexible delivery of special education services and an improved understanding of PL 94-142. Four service models were developed; however, only two allow for inclusion of special education students with appropriate supports in the regular classroom:

Model 1: Special and regular education teachers collaboratively serve children with and without disabilities in full-time regular classrooms. (The most inclusive model.)

Model 4: Students with disabilities are provided with special education services as needed and where needed. (Inclusion is an option, but not the only option.) (Herner, J.; Landers, F.)

Inclusion as defined by Ohio Federation Council for Exceptional Children (OFCEC) was referenced in constructing the survey used. The OFCEC believe that in inclusive settings the following exists:

All persons work to create a sense of oneness and belonging within the group while celebrating the diversity of individuals. Inclusion focuses on the positive, including respect, decision-making, and integrity for all people. (Hopkins, J.)

Purpose

Will the success of the inclusion model be influenced by the accurate understanding educational professionals have? The purpose of the proposed research was to identify the present knowledge of inclusion by Ohio educators as fact or myth. The above information regarding inclusion was not provided to the survey participants (to prevent bias.)

Method

Subjects

School teachers served as volunteers. They were obtained from the graduate class this research is a requirement and unidentified Ohio public school systems. Out of 75 surveys sent, 41 were returned.

Instrument

Based on research readings, interviews, and workshops attended from "Current Issues in Specific Learning Disabilities Emphasizing Inclusion based on PL 94-142" by Sherry McCarty, April 26, 1993, an achievement test was constructed. The teachers were asked to identify 24 statements as fact or myth.

Since educational and professional backgrounds of

the participants were beyond control, the identification of the statements as myth or fact became the focus of the research.

Procedure

The achievement test was devised from research reading as well as interviews of knowledgeable educators and consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of the identification of the participants by gender; age; years of teaching; degrees held; title: principal, regular educator, special educator. The second contained the statements for identification. (See Appendix)

Seventy-five test were distributed. A designated date for return of the completed test was given. Forty-one responses were received.

To insure the validity of the test answers, two experts (a university professor who holds workshops on inclusion and an elementary principal of a school which has an Ohio state-approved inclusion model) did critique the test. With a validated answer key, the test were scored.

After the tests were received, the answers were transferred to bubble sheets for computer analysis. Cronbach Alpha coefficient of internal consistency was found to be 0.71. The mean total score of the tests was 54.9%.

Results

The response per question were individually evaluated for percent accuracy as well as discrimination percent (difference between the correct and wrong answers). (See Table 1 for summary.)

The role of the special educator in relationship to inclusion appeared to be clear since statement 9 (special educator becomes an aid) received 63% accuracy as myth. Yet, statement 20 (state mandating total inclusion) reflected some misconception of special education with only 56% correctly identifying it as myth.

Building on the original intent of special education (statement 5) received a score of 71% correct. Statement 11 (special education is not a place; rather, a service) had 83% and statement 12 (stated continuum of services) had 54%. This seemed to

confirm that the intent of special education appears to be understood by most educators.

Statements 13 through 18 suggested improvements that would result through flexibility of services received an overall mean score of 49.7%. Each statements scored as follows:

- 13 (raised academic progress) 39%
- 14 (self-esteem & social skills) 54%
- 15 (improved attendance) 39%
- 16 (expanded services/resources) 51%
- 17 (increased regular class time) 66%
- 18 (increased parental satisfaction) 49%.

Social skills of all students (statement 1) received 39% correct identification as fact. Yet, improved self-esteem & social skills (statement 14) had 54% accuracy as fact. The 15% difference was not expected.

Administrative leadership (statement 6) with 41% as fact did not appear to be viewed as significant for improvements to occur. Yet, strength of the school (statement 19) received 71% fact identification. This left an unanswered question of where leadership is to be found since the need for leadership seemed

important.

Learned helplessness (statement 3) at 83%,
damaging to the regular student (statement 7) at
71%, and the reduction of class size happening
(statement 8) at 85% were correctly identified as myth.
The identification of these myths was viewed as
positive.

Job securing (statement 21) with 71% as myth, the
mandating of placement in regular education classes
(statement 2) with 73% as fact, requiring teachers to
adapt more (statement 4) with 46% as fact was a
surprise. Teachers appeared to realize that more will
be required of them. Yet, the need for adapting
instruction for the child first received 46%.

Inclusion is not mainstreaming (statement 22))
received 76% accuracy as myth. However, the least
restrictive environment (LRE) interpretation (statement
23) received 51% as myth. The continuum of services
(statement 12) addressed the fact that the LRE is
decided for each child. Yet, the need to vary the
definition of the LRE for each child did not appear to
be understood.

The civil rights (statement 24) received 71% accuracy as fact. This would tend to support to the notion of special education being a service (statement 11) Hence, inclusion would bring, not separate children because of learning differences.

Most teachers, not a majority, knew that inclusion could not change the academic standards of American schools in the eyes of the world (statement 10 received 66% accuracy).

A negative discrimination was displayed by statements 3, 5, 23? One explanation would be that the intention of the question was read as written. Also, the wording of these statements could be the reason for the negative discrimination.

The hypothesis was to identify the present knowledge of inclusion by Ohio educators. The conclusion of this research was that educators appear to be uninformed on PL 94-142 and the resulting educational reforms. Since an accurate understanding of inclusion does not exist, teachers would benefit from a comprehensive study of the "evolution" of special education.

Table 1

Educator's answers to "Inclusion" statements

Brief description using key words % discrim-
correct ination %

1. Improve social skills	39	23.3
2. Mandate placement in reg. ed.	73	14.3
3. Stop learned helplessness	83	-19.1
4. Teachers adapt first	46	28.6
5. Builds on original special ed intentions	71	-19.1
6. Administrative power	41	28.6
7. The "regular" student	71	47.6
8. Class size	85	19.0
9. The special educator becomes an "aid"	63	0.0
10. The academic standards	66	9.5
11. Not a place; rather, a service	83	23.8
12. Stated continuum of services	54	23.8
13-18. Through flexibility of service		
13. raised academic progress	39	66.6
14. increased self-esteem and social skills	54	66.7
15. improved attendance	39	52.5
16. expanded services/resources	51	52.4
17. increased regular class time	66	57.1
18. increased parental satisfaction	49	47.6
19. The success or failure	71	28.6
20. The state is mandating total inclusion.	56	4.7
21. Jobs are threatened.	80	38.1
22. Inclusion = mainstreaming	76	9.6
23. The correct LRE interpretation	51	-14.2
24. The civil rights of learning disabled.	71	47.6
Overall Total Score per Response	61.5	22.6

Note: Discrimination was the difference between the upper and lower 50%.

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Appendix

Understanding of Inclusion Survey: Assigned number

A. Identification of participant:

Gender: male/ female Age: _____ Years of teaching _____

Degree(s): BA - MA - PHD - other(_____)

Position: Elementary; Junior High; High School

Title: Principal; Regular Educator; Special Educator;

B. Questionnaire: Please identify the following statements about inclusion as fact (F) or myth (M) in front of each statement.

1. Inclusion will improve the social skills of all students.
2. The courts can mandate placement in regular education classroom for a child who has qualified for placement in special education class as the least restrictive environment.
3. Inclusion will put a stop to the learned helplessness which has become a negative outcome of special education.
4. Inclusion will make teachers adapt instruction first for the individual child instead of placement in special education.
5. Inclusion builds on the original intentions for special education which was the restoration of order to the classroom.
6. Administration holds the power to assure that students with disabilities are successfully included in restructured schools.
7. The "regular" student will be damaged by the presence of the special needs child.
8. Class size will be reduced by inclusion.
9. The special educator will become an "aid" to the regular educator.
10. Inclusion would improve the academic standards of American schools in the eyes of the world.
11. Special education is not a place; rather, a service with specially designed instruction uniquely designed to meet the needs of the child with a disability.
12. Special education services must follow the stated continuum of services - regular classroom, special classes, special schools, hospitals, institutions, jails (of which one is inclusion).
- 13-18. Through flexibility of service (action not a place or a prescription) at the local school district, the following improvements can occur when inclusion is used as an option:
 13. raised academic progress
 14. increased self-esteem and social skills
 15. improved attendance
 16. expanded services/resources
 17. increased time spent in regular class with regular students where appropriate
 18. increased satisfaction of education programs for the parents of students
19. The success or failure of the inclusion model appears to be centered on the strength of the school's attitude, flexibility, involvement, and collaboration efforts.
20. The state is mandating total inclusion.
21. Special education teachers' jobs are threatened.
22. Inclusion and mainstreaming are the same thing.
23. Inclusion is the correct interpretation of the least restrictive environment placement.
24. The concept of inclusion affirms the current mandated services by federal legislation as well as the civil rights of the learning disabled.